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ABSTRACT

Sixty-two women religious were administered the 16 Personality Factor Questionnaire (16-PF) and the Personal Orientation Inventory in 1969 and again in 1972. The Pearson product-moment correlations on the 16-PF ranged from .18 to .77; the mean correlation was .36. Statistical significance was reached on 14 to 16 factors. In a "t" difference analysis, significant differences were found on 9 of 16 factors. The Pearson product-moment correlations on the Personal Orientation Inventory ranged from .12 to .82 with a mean of .59. Statistical significance was reached on 11 of the 12 scales indicating that for individual women the relative ordering remained essentially the same except for the way in which they viewed the dichotomies of life. In a "t" difference analysis, significant differences were found on 4 of the 12 scales. The results indicate that various personality characteristics have shifted in the direction of increased self-awareness, self-sufficiency, and inner resourcefulness. As a group, women religious appear to be more inner-directed, more aware of self-actualizing values, and more spontaneous with a higher regard for themselves. The investigators suggest that these shifts might, at least in part, be due to the growing modernization within religious communities and the resultant increasing flexibility and freedom of choice for women religious. (Author)

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PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS: A THREE YEAR FOLLOW-UP

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INTRODUCTION:

Vatican II initiated a process of change within religious orders promoting adaptation to modern conditions. This self renewal involved study and re-evaluation of the overall communities and an increased awareness of the individual sister. An examination of the recent history of women religious reveals a process of change, growth and self-investigation which confronts the sister-teacher, internally and externally.

Not infrequently, the religious realm was formerly viewed as a haven of security where an individual could be certain of finding out who she was and where she was going. Since Vatican II, a strong link with the past has been broken and changes have ensued with an emphasis on individual responsibility and freedom of choice.

The very changes initiated by Vatican II have raised the question of "Who am I as a religious," according to the Dignan, a member of the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and a psychologist. The changes which have occurred in the social structure of the congregations have been directed toward creating stable persons, rather than building a safe, stable superstructure. Internalized control within the individual sister should lead to a consequent increase in spontaneity, warmth, support and a deepening of the ideas of freedom, justice, responsibility and commitment. During the period of change and decrease of structure, Dignan feels there was an increased anxiety for some individual sisters while, for others, it brought a greater ease of performance. Those in religious life are being confronted with a re-definition of themselves as religious as they seek a new identity for new freedoms which necessitate new responsibilities.

Unlike the past where verbal interactions were limited, there is now a great deal

of discussion among sisters as they attempt to re-define their roles in light of Vatican II. Dignan also feels there is not enough attention given to the psychological effects of job satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Although she is aware that supernatural motivation can help work through many doubts and difficulties, it cannot undo the stress which is caused by roles which are never assimilated into a sister's identity. Dignan suggests that Superiors who are aware that time and training for apostolic work is creating role conflict, should assist the individual in integrating the two roles, religious and vocational. It seems that those suited best for religious life are individuals whose ego identity is founded on basic trust, autonomy, initiative and industry. They are capable of being adaptable, responsible, generous, open and dedicated to Christ and willing to serve him. "And there are in religious communities today women who brought these qualities to us but whose development was arrested because their identity as individuals was not carefully distinguished from that of the community," to quote Dignan.

Every community has been involved in re-evaluation and self-renewal. Some communities, such as the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVMs), have renewed at a faster pace. "Their special appeal is their courageous attitude toward renewal," according to O'Connor. The process of renewal has not been without its problems and there was polarization within the BVMs toward traditionalism or toward modernization.

The Sister Formation Conference at Woodstock in 1968 stated:

> American sisters, especially in their chapters of renewal, are envisaging their lives more and more in terms of person in community. They relate this vision to the universal struggle on behalf of the human person and the community of mankind.

Within this framework of the detotalization of the structure of congregations, there is a new awareness of the individual person within the congregation. Because of the shift, there is a striving for a new identity and possibly some motivation toward living a fuller life, as the individual attempts to become aware and develop her own uniqueness within her community. This type of growth and becoming can be related to Maslow's self-actualization.

Many communities have adapted an outward change of dress which may be a symbol of far-reaching change in the life style and government of religious orders of women. The change has been great enough that O'Dowd refers to Pre and Post Vatican life styles. Many sister-teachers are no longer told where and how to do their apostolic work, but are now given the opportunity for choice.

The BVMs who own and operate Mundelein College have been deeply immersed in the process of change and growth through self-renewal. The community is no longer a total, self-contained authoritarian institution, but has been "detotalized." It seems only natural that a community of innovative, progressive women religious, such as the BVMs, would initiate, in Mundelein College, a graduate study program in religious education in 1969 and, in addition, sanction vocational and personality testing of sister-teachers (women religious) for their own edification. Thompson, Healy and Cosgrove have investigated personality within their order and Dignan, another BVM, has written on change and ego-identity since Vatican II.

Previous research has shown that the interests of sister-teachers are different from women in general and need to be more fully explored to assist the individual in her vocational choice as it relates to apostolic work. The literature indicates that certain personality characteristics are manifested by women religious. However,

there are also wide differences among women religious which appear to be related to the religious and cultural environment.

The original sample in 1969 consisted of 96 sister-teachers who responded to letters sent out by the Director of Research at Mundelein College to all of the sister-teachers in the new graduate program in religious education, as well as to members of the BVM order taking a variety of courses in the summer of 1969. The sample for this current study was comprised of 62 of the original 96 sister-teachers who responded to the 1972 mailing.

The subjects were members of various religious congregations of women, had taught school and were registered at Mundelein in the summer of 1969, though there were wide differences in age, teaching experience, length of time in religious life, and education. Sixty of the 62 sister-teachers wished their tests interpreted to them--45 percent were BVMs and 55 percent were from fifteen different orders.

The three tests utilized were the Strong Vocational Interest Blank, revised by Dr. David Campbell, Cattell's 16 Personality Factor Questionnaire and Shostrom's Personal Orientation Inventory. The SVIB will not be discussed in today's presentation.

The 16PF has been used in several research projects concerning women religious. Sister Thompson felt that the 16PF possessed the most relevant characteristics of personality with the least irrelevant content for women religious.

The POI, developed by Shostrom, is based on Maslow's theory of motivation, Reisman's system of inner- and outer-directedness, and May's and Perls' concept of time-orientation.

The three tests were selected for use in this study to provide a composite picture of the individual sister's interests, personality characteristics and motivational orientation.

16 PERSONALITY FACTOR QUESTIONNAIRE

On the 16 Personality Factor Questionnaire, which attempted to reveal personality characteristics of the sisters, in pre- and post-testing, women religious scored high 9 on Trait B, indicating that women religious have high general mental capacity, are insightful, fast learning and intellectually adaptable. There is some indication that this measure of intelligence carries over into the personality realm some of the following: inclined to have more intellectual interest, better judgment, higher morals and is persevering. Considering the nature of the population of this study, the higher score would seem to possibly go along with the aspects of personality mentioned.

At both testings, women religious scored low 4 on Trait N which indicates a complete directness, spontaneous outspokenness, an almost naive emotional genuineness with a natural warmth and liking for people. Occupationally, missionary priests also scored low. A low score indicates "teaching success, and there are other indications that low-N individuals are more trusted and liked--perhaps by children." (Cattell, et. al., 1970, p. 100.) Almost all of the women religious in this study were consistently engaged in the apostolic work of teaching. The description of this trait is congruent with both teaching and religious life.

In 1969 women religious scored high 7 on Trait I, indicating that they were more dependent, clinging and insecure than in 1972 when they scored 6. The

communities of women religious have become less sheltered. Perhaps the change in trait depends on nurture. However, the inherent nature of the trait may allow for the slight change.

On Trait M, women religious scored high 7 in 1969 and 6 in 1972, indicating that they have an intense subjectivity and inner mental life. Pre-Vatican religious life resembled a protective family environment. The shift on M as with I from high to average could relate to the Post-Vatican community environment. In addition, this trait is more liable to fluctuation with the psychological state of the individual.

Women religious in 1969 scored high 7 on Trait O which is related to individuals who feel inadequate, are depressed, scrupulous, lonely, brooding, have guilt proneness, poorness of spirit and general unworthiness, phobic symptoms, a strong sense of obligation and guilt feelings. Occupationally, high scores on Trait O occur in religious groups. Therefore, in 1969, the women religious in this study resembled other religious groups. In 1972 there was a two-point drop in this trait, indicating the women religious were more self-confident, cheerful, expedient, vigorous, not as scrupulous, had less fears and were given to simple action. The post-testing was done six years after Vatican II when many of the drastic changes (i.e., no habit or shortened habit, the freedom to talk with others--both religious and lay--handling money, freedom to go out alone) had already taken place. Women religious, in seeking "a new identity" and awareness, seem to have assimilated the environmental changes over the three-year follow-up.

It is of special interest to note the shifting on Trait Q1 from high score 7 in 1969 to average score of 5 in 1972. The characteristic expression on the positive

side is related to experimenting, liberal and free thinking. Individuals who score high are more well-informed, more inclined to experiment with problem solutions and less inclined to moralize. Six years after Vatican II women religious have become more conservative, respecting the established ideas and tolerant of traditional difficulties. Women religious, having changed their communities, are not continuing to radically alter their environments, but appear to be acclimating, integrating and assimilating the change.

PERSONAL ORIENTATION INVENTORY

The Personal Orientation Inventory proposes to study inner motivation of persons. In 1969 women religious were found to be not only less self-actualized, but they resembled normals less and non-self-actualized individuals least, normals most, and were fairly similar to self-actualized individuals.

In many studies utilizing the POI there was some kind of group sensitivity training which increased the post- scores in the direction of self-actualization. In this study there was no attempt by the investigator to change the women religious through a structured group interaction. However, the very nature of Vatican II has allowed for more group interaction within communities and with the lay population. The increase towards greater self-actualization on five scales and the decrease on one scale would seem to, possibly, be related to the more open, less rigid, community; the environment women religious now find themselves in.

Research with the POI has shown that, with higher psychological health, individuals are more self-actualized and possess attitudes and values which increase teaching effectiveness. Women religious, according to the POI, have increased in

psychological health, but whether this has increased their teaching effectiveness was not measured in this study.

Although the degree to which women religious accepted self-actualizing values increased over a three-year period, they apparently had not assimilated these values sufficiently to implement them.

In 1969, women religious were perhaps slightly more aware of their own needs and feelings (Fr) than Non-Self-Actualized Group, yet similar but much less aware than Self-Actualized Group and Normal Group. However, by 1972, the changes in environmental behavioral demands allowed women religious to become more aware of their own feelings so that they differed from Non-Self-Actualized Group and were similar to Self-Actualized Group and the Normal Adult Group.

Women religious were less fearful of spontaneously expressing their feelings (S) in 1969 and 1972 than Non-Self-Actualized Group. They became less fearful over time and, in 1972, were similar to Self-Actualized Group and Normal Group. Perhaps as religious life became more open, the environmental situation was "safe" to express oneself without reprimand or repercussions.

Although women religious had slightly higher self-worth (Sr) than the Non-Self-Actualized Group, they resembled them and were lower in self-worth than Self-Actualized Group and the Normal Adult Group in 1969. Because of the opportunities of Post-Vatican life, by 1972 women religious became more aware of their strengths as individuals and were less self-effacing. They resembled Self-Actualized Group and Normal Adult Group and were unlike Non-Self-Actualized Group in their ability to assess, accept and like themselves.

In 1969 and 1972 women religious accepted themselves (Sa) less than Self-Actualized Group, more than the Non-Self-Actualized Group, were as self-accepting as Normal Adult Group in 1969, but were less self-accepting than Normal Adult Group in 1972. Women religious accepted themselves (Sr) because of their strengths in 1972, but were less accepting of their weaknesses (Sa) in 1972. With the shift in higher self-worth (Sr) women religious appear to be less accepting of their "new" selves. Sr-Sa (Self-Regard and Self Acceptance) represents a self-perception and it is harder to achieve Sa than Sr.

Women religious viewed nature of man (Nc) in 1969 as essentially good, perhaps "idealized" and did not resemble Self-Actualized Group, Normal Adult Group or Non-Self-Actualized Group. However, in 1969, women religious resembled Self-Actualized Group; their views of man and the dichotomies of existence possibly becoming more realistic.

Women religious were unable to accept their own aggressive feelings (A) in the same manner as Self-Actualized Group in both 1969 and 1972. However, a change occurred in their ability to accept anger and hostility as natural from 1969 to 1972. By 1972 they were less similar to the Non-Self-Actualized Group and more similar to the Normal Adult Group.

During the three-year period women religious became more self-actualized and similar to normals only resembling Non-Self-Actualized Group in the ability to apply self-actualizing values.

As environmental changes occur, time is needed to learn about the self, and assimilate a new identity. McCarthy and Dunn indicated women religious responded

to environmental changes in formation and the findings of this study are similar, i.e., that change does occur as a result of environmental interaction. In addition, these findings resemble Healy and Cosgrove, indicating a possible "new" woman religious.

SUMMATION

In summary, interests remain essentially the same for women religious in the three-year follow-up. They continue to enjoy religious activities as well as teaching and social service. However, as noted previously, they do not score high on the nun-teacher scale.

The women religious are not as radical in 1972 as they were in 1969. They are more self-confident, independent and less anxious. As women religious venture into the world from their "open-detotalized" communities, they resemble the general female population more than women religious in missionary work.

Although change might have occurred merely with the passage of time, the motivation toward self-actualization increased self-awareness and independence would indicate that the environmental changes affected the women religious. The overall changes in community life were not slight, even in relatively conservative orders (e.g., change in rule of silence).

Women religious in this study did not fit the stereotype description of a nun, nor did Becker's sampling of successful women religious before Vatican II. Dignan, a BVM and clinical psychologist, stated that there were Pre-Vatican women religious who were able to find their identity in community life. The changes since Vatican II are enabling more women religious to accomplish this.

The overall environmental change may decrease the number of women religious, but increase the strength of the individual. Exactly what the personality characteristics of women religious are in this new Post-Vatican era need to be investigated further. Unfortunately, the limits of time and energy and the number of variables in the study did not permit further analysis of the data.

Although the population would probably diminish, a longitudinal study at six and nine years, the self-renewal of women religious in this study, would further the investigation of environmental changes and personal integration.

REACTOR

As a reactor to this paper, I am reporting my first impressions and feelings while I was reading this research.

Whenever I read any research that shows what sisters have been like--really, what I have been like--my first feeling is one of anger and fear: "How dare anybody say this about sisters!" "How dare anybody discover what I was like!" "That hurts!" "Will others accept me if they find out all these things about me?" Then, the next feeling that follows is, "Thank you, God, for giving me strength to live with all this paralysis and still to get so much work done for your greater honor and glory. Thank you even more for giving me the grace and insight to work through this paralysis and become so much more free to give so much more of myself to You and to others!"

I'd like to elaborate on this. When the first research was being done on religious, many sisters--and I among them, could not--or would not--believe what was being shown. Basically, I tended to view it as, "How could anyone doubt my sincerity or integrity in being a religious? Religious profess perfection as a way of life. These things point out imperfection. These researchers are tampering with holy things and have no knowledge of this domain or this way of life." Little did I realize then how many of these researchers were religious! This is how high my defenses were back in the sixties--so high they blinded me to real truth. It was only as I became aware of my own inner structures that I was able to say, "It's true--this is the way I was." This is still the way many of my initial responses are; however, the inner processing is vastly different, enriching both myself and, hopefully, others.

I think it was quite difficult--and for some it is STILL quite difficult--to look at what the picture test results seem to indicate, for example, as on the Personal Orientation Inventory, to see on how many scales we seemed to resemble non-actualized persons, rather than the normal and/or self-actualized populations.

In her thesis, of which this is a resume, Audrey brings out several of the contributing factors that have caused religious women to become what they were. The rule of silence is one prime example--how was it possible for us to score high on interpersonal relationships when the rule of silence "allowed" speaking to others only in necessity, when charity required it, and during recreation, encouraging religious to be more silent than interacting? In considering humility, obedience, poverty, chastity, it seemed that forgetting self was so stressed that one's individuality may have counted only in relation to the good being done for others. Because this outlook robbed us of this individuality and person-ness, as I look back at what it did, I DO get angry!

Being human, I have a tendency to want to swing to the opposite extreme--I want to be free and maybe even want to relive what I was cheated of. This is a purely natural response to angry feelings. And some women religious did just that. This report shows that, in 1969, religious women were more radical than in 1972. I appreciated Audrey's observation that it may be indicative of the fact that we are "acclimating, integrating and assimilating change"--that this is why scores may be tending now toward conservatism. In my opinion, in some communities, the "baby was thrown out with the bathwater"--some basic values are sacrificed for the sake of external practices.

I am glad for the changes I have been able to make in myself on a purely naked,

in-depth level. I feel this has helped me develop my personality in a way where I feel freedom is tempered with prudence and wisdom. This, in turn, has given me a more human, more deep, and more spiritual insight into my vows and into community life. And so, I can say, for myself, the picture of these test results indicated where I was and, hopefully, that I'm growing and developing. That is where many sisters were and that, hopefully, we are all growing in openness without sacrificing values.

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